

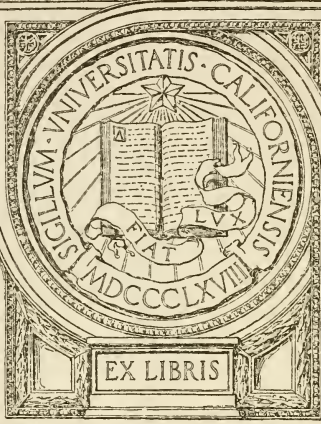
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# The Amusement Situation in the City of Boston

Based on a study of the thea-  
tres for ten weeks from

November 28, 1909,

to February 5,

1910



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## THE AMUSEMENT SITUATION IN BOSTON

A REPORT MADE BY THE DRAMA COMMITTEE OF THE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY CLUB, COVERING A PERIOD OF  
TEN WEEKS FROM NOV. 28, 1909, TO FEB. 5, 1910

### I

The Drama Committee of the Twentieth Century Club has undertaken a study of the theatres and moving-picture shows of Boston for a period of ten weeks, to discover just what sort of entertainment is presented the citizens of an American city in the middle of the forty-week theatrical season. While if the whole forty weeks had been covered the percentages might somewhat vary from the figures given, yet this statement of the different kinds of entertainment given for a quarter-season should at least provide definite data to take the place of the assumptions that have, in the past, been based upon mere conjecture.

A cursory examination of the attractions in the principal theatres during the period under observation reveals at the outset certain definite facts. It is notable that the different theatre managements, exclusive of those giving burlesque and vaudeville, make no attempt to establish a permanent clientèle,—a fundamental need in the conduct of any other business. It is difficult, for instance, to understand what prompted the Shuberts, after opening their new theatre with two weeks of Shakespeare by Sothorn and Marlowe, to put on for their second attraction as commonplace a

musical comedy as "The Midnight Sons." The Majestic Theatre, located a block or two away and of substantially the same capacity, changed its attraction on the same day from "The Beauty Spot" to "The Melting Pot." As both theatres are under the same management, it would seem much more logical to have placed "The Melting Pot" in the Shubert and "The Midnight Sons" in the Majestic; particularly as the acoustics of this house are so bad that spoken lines are heard imperfectly in most parts of the house.

The Majestic, Shubert, and Globe Theatres are now all under the Shubert management, and there is no reason why the Shubert Theatre could not consistently be given first-class serious attractions, the Majestic musical comedies, and the Globe farces and other light performances more acceptable to its *clientèle* already partially established. Of the other Boston Theatres, the Hollis, the Colonial, the Boston, and the Park are all under the same control, and are booked through the regular syndicate agency popularly known as the "Theatrical Trust." Yet, while the Hollis has generally had the better class of serious and light drama, the Colonial has alternated from serious and comedy attractions to musical performances of the cheaper type. The Park is smaller, and has been given over to the longer "runs" of popular plays. The Tremont—long the only independent house in the city, but now booked through the above organization—is yet less consistently run than under the direct control of its previous management, when for months at a time one first-class musical attraction regularly succeeded another.

Existing moving-picture shows now seat 402,428 persons weekly. By the end of another year this class of amusement houses will probably accommodate 510,428 spectators each week, exclusive of

Sunday performances and of other smaller picture shows that will, undoubtedly, spring up during that time!\*

Then include the four theatres devoted to what is called "Burlesque": the Casino, with a weekly seating capacity of 24,496; the Howard, with 17,868; the Columbia, 21,588; the Gaiety, 17,748,—a total weekly seating capacity for this form of entertainment of 80,700. Add to these the Palace, Hub, Bowdoin Square, and Austin & Stone's (theatres giving moving pictures and vaudeville), with a total weekly seating capacity of 79,362 people. Finally, add the best class of vaudeville theatres, limited to Keith's and the American Music Hall, the first seating 24,240 and the second 21,504 a week, or a total of 45,744. These figures show that to-day Boston has weekly accommodation for 608,238 persons. Within a year this provision will be increased to at least 750,238. For the ten weeks reported upon, the total seating capacity of these theatres was 6,082,380. To this sum must be added 372,522 seats to be deducted from the total of the regular theatres on account of the performances like "The Jolly Bachelors" and "The Follies of 1909," which were only vaudeville. This would show a total of 6,454,902 seats for ten weeks of vaudeville, burlesque, and moving-picture performances!

To offset this, there are ten regular theatres, with weekly seating capacity as follows: Hollis, 13,120; Boston, 22,784; Park, 10,200; Colonial, 12,816; Majestic, 13,800; Globe, 12,248; Tremont, 13,880; Castle Square, 21,756; Grand Opera, 17,811; and the recently opened Shubert, 12,720,—or a total of 151,135 seats per week as against 608,238 vaudeville, burlesque, and moving-picture show capacity.

\*Already the foundations are laid for the National Theatre, on Tremont Street near Berkeley, to be used for combined vaudeville and moving pictures, and to seat 3,590. A new vaudeville theatre is also projected for the Park Square district, to seat 1,600.

For the ten weeks these theatres actually showed a total capacity of 1,020,751, making deductions for omitted performances and vaudeville. Add the Boston Opera House, with a weekly capacity, estimating five performances, of 13,590 people. For the six weeks, the actual number during which opera was performed, the capacity was 81,540 seats. The ten weeks' total for legitimate drama and opera would then be 1,102,291.

Taken with the total of 6,454,902 seats for vaudeville, burlesque, and moving-picture attractions, the grand total seating capacity for all kinds of performances was 7,557,193, for ten weeks in a city having an estimated population of 625,000!

Those familiar with the field in other sections of the country state that Boston has a greater number of performances of the cheaper class in proportion to the population than any other American city, not excepting New York or Philadelphia. Certainly, the record, as compiled above, goes far to substantiate this claim.

The percentage of each class of entertainment, based on these totals, is as follows: vaudeville and moving-picture shows, 85.4; legitimate performances, 13.5; grand opera, 1.1.

The subdivisions given in the tables bear the following percentages to the whole: Shakespearian drama, 0.9; Drama, 1.7; Melodrama, 3.6; Farce, 1.3; Minstrels, 0.3; Comedy, 4.9; Musical Comedy, 5.5 (of which only 0.7 approaches legitimate comic opera); and, finally, Dancing, 1.2.

The two principal vaudeville theatres seated 6.1% of the whole; burlesque, 10.7%; combined vaudeville and moving-picture theatres, 10.5%; moving-picture shows, 53.3%.

The eight first-class theatres seated 14.8%\* the stock theatres (including ten weeks of the Castle

\*The difference between this figure and the 13.5% given above arises from the previous deduction of attendance at the legitimate theatres at performances mainly of a vaudeville character.



Square and three weeks of the Bowdoin Square), 3.4%; the Grand Opera House, with straight melodrama, 2.4%. These "seating capacities" are easily reduced to their money values. At \$0.10 a seat, the moving-picture shows have an income of \$40,242.80 per week; the four moving-picture and vaudeville theatres (averaged at \$0.15 a seat), \$11,904.30; the vaudeville theatres and burlesque houses (at an average of \$0.50 a seat), \$27,872 and \$40,350 per week, respectively; the eight regular theatres (at \$1 average per seat), \$111,568; the Castle Square and Grand Opera House (at an average of \$0.35 per seat), \$13,898.45; the Boston Opera, with 13,590 seats (averaged at \$2 apiece), \$27,180. The total expenditure for amusements in Boston figured on seating capacity would be \$273,000 a week.

The overwhelming preponderance of cheaper and less desirable forms of entertainment is to be noted. Yet these theatres evidently appeal more and more strongly to their habitués. The great growth of new houses of this type indicates not only a rapidly increasing following, but also a tremendous and growing tendency toward a lower and less desirable form of recreative amusement. This tendency is to be seriously condemned. It is also to be regarded with something of alarm; since a constant attendance upon such forms of entertainment—if long persisted in—cannot but make the spectator less able to enjoy genuine dramatic art, or any other serious and profitable amusement. The fact, also, that a large proportion of the entertainments in even the first-class theatres is of a strikingly vulgar character, approaching burlesque or vaudeville (as are most of the so-called musical comedies of the day) indicates that the theatre, potentially a tremendous educative force, has under present conditions so degenerated that it is actively exercising an equally tremendous and wide-

spread influence in lowering public standards of morality and decreasing the average of efficiency of the individual citizen.

## II

The statistics in this ten-week review have been compiled in three tables. The first\* shows the attractions playing at the eight principal theatres, the Grand Opera House, and at the theatres running stock companies,—the Castle Square; and the Bowdoin Square, up to the time it was changed to moving-picture shows and vaudeville.

A second set of two tables gives statistics in regard to theatres, and moving-picture shows other than those holding a theatrical license.

The third table shows an analysis, roughly classifying the plays produced during this period according to their general character, giving the number of performances and the total seating capacity to which they were capable of playing during that time.

On account of the great divergence in the size of the auditoriums (running from 250 up to 3,000 seating capacity) and in the number of performances each week (running from 5 up to 78) all comparisons are based on the "seating capacity" of the houses per week, as on the whole the fairest method. To obtain the total seating capacity of the Boston theatres and moving-picture shows for the regular forty weeks' season, it is only necessary to multiply the total figures given by four, remembering, however, that the moving-picture shows *run the entire fifty-two weeks of the year*, and that a number of theatres, both burlesque and first-class, run *nearly* through the summer season; while others—such as the Globe—are transformed into moving-picture houses, and kept open through the summer, giving four to eight performances a day.

\* Table I will be found on pages 18-19; Tables II and III on pages 10-12 inclusive.

It being impracticable to obtain from the management of the various houses exact figures for attendance during the period under analysis, the basis of *seating capacity* has been employed throughout. While at times of the day the moving-picture show is not full, at other times there are from fifty to one hundred people standing at the back, and all seats are occupied. The first-class theatres rarely play to less than two-thirds of the house capacity, while they often have three or four hundred standing admissions at a performance. Moving-picture shows *must* run to from one-half to two-thirds and the theatre to from two-thirds to three-fourths its total capacity to meet their expenses. The listed seating capacities of the theatres and moving-picture shows are, in all cases, taken from figures given on the city records. In some cases the capacity of the house is probably more. The Boston Theatre, for instance, rated by the city at 2,848, is always figured at 3,172; which figure appears again in print in the current *American Magazine* for March.

The number of performances of the moving-picture shows has been compiled from statements from the managers; yet these figures cannot be considered as so authoritative, as the length of performance is varied according to the attendance. At morning, and about six o'clock, when the attendance is lightest, the program is run to greater length without the repetition of any one feature; while during the crowded part of the evening and the afternoon the program is made considerably shorter, to take care of the crowd waiting for seats. The variation in length of the performance is often as much as from one hour and a half at the duller moments of the day to forty-five minutes at the more crowded. When the performances are shortened, it would merely result in giving a greater number than those stated: rarely, if ever, would the number be less.

TABLE II

## REGULAR THEATRES

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Seating capacity.</i>	<i>No. of weekly performances.</i>	<i>Weekly seating capacity.</i>
<i>Opera.</i>			
Boston Opera House . . . . .	2,718	5	13,590
<i>First-class Theatres.</i>			
Hollis Street Theatre . . . . .	1,640	8	13,120
Colonial . . . . .	1,602	8	12,816
Park . . . . .	1,275	8	10,200
Tremont . . . . .	1,735	8	13,880
Shubert . . . . .	1,590	8	12,720
Majestic . . . . .	1,725	8	13,800
Globe . . . . .	1,531	8	12,248
Boston . . . . .	2,848	8	22,784
			<hr/>
			111,568
<i>Popular.</i>			
Grand Opera House . . . . .	1,979	9	17,811
<i>Stock House.</i>			
Castle Square Theatre . . . . .	1,813	12	21,756
<i>Vaudeville Houses.</i>			
Keith's Theatre . . . . .	2,020	12	24,240
American Music Hall . . . . .	1,792	12	21,504
			<hr/>
			45,744
<i>Burlesque Houses.</i>			
Gaiety Theatre . . . . .	1,479	12	17,748
Casino . . . . .	1,958	12	23,496
Howard Athenæum . . . . .	1,489	12	17,868
Columbia Music Hall . . . . .	1,799	12	21,588
			<hr/>
			80,700
<i>Vaudeville and Moving Picture.</i>			
Palace Theatre . . . . .	1,000	30	30,000
Hub Theatre . . . . .	1,169	12	14,028
Bowdoin Square Theatre . . . . .	1,365	12	16,380
Austin & Stone's . . . . .	351	54	18,954
			<hr/>
			79,362

# MOVING-PICTURE THEATRES

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Seating capacity.</i>	<i>Performances daily.</i>	<i>Performances weekly.</i>	<i>Weekly seating capacity.</i>
<i>Boston.</i>				
Scenic Temple . . . . .	1,444	3	18	24,992
Bijou Dream . . . . .	838	5	30	25,140
* Beacon . . . . .	797			
Washington . . . . .	529	8	48	25,392
Unique . . . . .	499	7	42	20,958
Old South . . . . .	452	4	48	21,696
Potter . . . . .	446	3	18	8,028
Crown . . . . .	427		7	2,989
Comique . . . . .	397	12	72	28,584
Star . . . . .	365	13	78	28,470
Pastime . . . . .	360	8	48	17,280
Paradise . . . . .	352	10	60	21,120
Premier . . . . .	318	10	60	19,080
Queen . . . . .	310	7	42	13,020
Empire . . . . .	300	8	48	14,400
Ye Liberty . . . . .	298	8	48	14,304
Joliette . . . . .	276	10	60	16,560
Dreamland . . . . .	259	10	60	15,540
Nickelodeon . . . . .	135	9	54	7,290
<i>Roxbury.</i>				
Roxbury . . . . .	760	5	30	22,800
Zenicon Temple . . . . .	425			
Winthrop Hall . . . . .	400			
Orienta . . . . .	270	4	24	6,480
<i>South Boston.</i>				
Olympia . . . . .	660	4	24	15,840
Congress Hall . . . . .	550	3	18	9,000
Imperial . . . . .	430	4	24	10,320
<i>East Boston.</i>				
Scenic Temple . . . . .	575		9	5,175
Magic . . . . .	198	6	36	7,128
Empire . . . . .	151	3	18	2,318
<i>Charlestown.</i>				
Union . . . . .	351		8	2,808
Terminal . . . . .	301		16	4,816
				402,428
<i>Dorchester.</i>				
Happy Hour . . . . .	300			
<i>Allston.</i>				
Scenic Temple . . . . .	400			
<i>Roslindale.</i>				
Wise Hall . . . . .	250			

The statistics on Moving-picture Shows do not include those located in the cities of Cambridge and Chelsea.

\* This theatre opened Feb. 19, 1910, with 8 daily performance (and 4 on Sunday giving a weekly capacity of 38,256 seats.

## TABLE III

CLASSIFIED LIST OF PLAYS FROM NOV. 29, 1909, TO FEB. 5, 1910.

<i>Name of play.</i>	<i>Theatre.</i>	<i>No. of per- formances.</i>	<i>Total capacity.</i>
Shakespearian Tragedy			
Romeo and Juliet.	Shubert.	3	4,770
Hamlet.	Shubert.	2	3,180
Othello.	Castle Square.	12	21,756
Shakespearian Comedy.			
Twelfth Night.	Shubert.	3	4,770
The Merchant of Venice.	Shubert.	4	6,360
The Taming of the Shrew.	"	3	4,770
The Taming of the Shrew.	Castle Square.	12	21,756
Drama.			
Israel.	Hollis.	16	26,240
Awakening of Helena Richie.	Colonial.	16	25,632
The Battle.	Majestic.	16	27,600
Deborah of Tod's.	Majestic.	16	27,600
Honor.	Castle Square.	12	21,756
Melodrama.			
A Fool there was.	Hollis.	24	39,360
Van Allen's Wife.	Park.	16	20,400
The City.	Globe.	16	24,496
The Wolf.	Globe.	16	24,496
Nine weeks of Performance.	Grand Opera.	81	160,299
Comedy.			
What Every Woman Knows.	Hollis.	8	13,120
Inconstant George.	"	16	26,240
Detective Sparkes.	"	16	26,240
The Man from Home.	Park.	40	51,000
A Gentleman from Mississippi.	Park.	16	20,400
Penelope.	Colonial.	16	25,632
The Chaperone.	Majestic.	8	13,800
The Circus Man.	Boston.	32	91,136
Such a Little Queen.	Tremont.	16	27,760
Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.	Tremont.	40	69,400
Quincy Adams Sawyer.	Grand Opera.	9	17,811
Farce.			
Man with a Past.	Castle Square.	12	21,756
Are you a Mason?	Castle Square.	12	21,756
The Girl from Rector's.	Boston.	18	51,264
Musical Comedy.			
The Young Turk.	Colonial.	16	25,632
* Miss Mollie May.	"	16	25,632
The Silver Star.	"	16	25,632
* The Beauty Spot.	Majestic.	16	27,600
Dick Whittington.	Majestic.	23	39,675
Bright Eyes.	Boston.	31	88,288
Follies of 1909.	Tremont.	24	41,640
The Jolly Bachelors.	Globe.	16	24,496
Mr. Lode of Koal.	Globe.	16	24,496
"1915."	Castle Square.	51	92,463
Minstrels.			
Dockstader's.	Globe.	16	24,496
Dancing.			
Ruth St. Denis.	Park.	8	10,200

\* "Straight" Musical Comedy performances; the others listed being composed of vaudeville specialties.

The proportions of the different classes of plays are as follows: Shakespeare was played to 67,362 seats capacity. Of this 43,412 covered two weeks at the Castle Square; 23,950, the Sothern and Marlowe engagement.

The seating capacity for performances of Dramas was 124,828; of Melodrama, 269,051, of which 160,299 was at the Grand Opera House, and 108,752 at the regular theatres. The performances of Farce amounted to 94,776, and Minstrels to 24,496. Comedy took 372,539; Musical Comedy (largely vaudeville), 415,554.

The large proportion of Shakespearian drama is explained by the fact that two Shakespearian plays were put on for a week apiece by the Castle Square Theatre Stock Company, and that Sothern and Marlowe appeared as the opening two weeks' attraction at the new Shubert Theatre. Two clever American comedies were "The Gentleman from Mississippi" and "The Man from Home," portions of the runs of both of which came within this selected period. Two other exceptional comedies, of slightly whimsical tendencies, are "What Every Woman Knows" and "Such a Little Queen." Of all the long list of musical comedies, but one, "Miss Molly May," had any particular class.

Two plays of unusual interest were "The Awakening of Helena Richie" and "The City," the latter being probably the best acted play of the year and one of the season's most powerful modern dramas. A drama of some power and of a certain sociological interest also was "The Battle," played for two weeks at the Majestic.

For a season in which farce has been so popular, this division was very poorly represented during the ten weeks, only three being listed in all, and one of these being the quite unnecessarily unpleasant and suggestive "Girl from Rector's." Partial explanation may be found in the five weeks of

performances of "The Blue Mouse" that immediately preceded, and the engagements of "Going Some" and "Is Matrimony a Failure?" that immediately followed the investigated period.

Musical comedy also does not seem to have its full and customary complement in these figures. A great run of such shows, earlier in the season, may account for this. For four entire weeks out of the twelve that preceded November 29, *all* of the seven principal theatres were monopolized by musical comedies or farces! Musical comedy had been playing, exclusively, at the Boston Theatre, for these twelve weeks; at the Majestic for nine of the twelve; at the Tremont for ten; and at the Colonial for six,— a total of thirty-seven out of a possible forty-eight weeks! Of the so-called "literary" drama there has been a considerable deficit. Sudermann's "Honor" was played, in a very poor adaptation, for one week at the Castle Square Theatre. Unless one or two of those plays just named could be included in this classification, nothing in the regular theatrical season is to be added to this somewhat abbreviated record.

However, Percy Mackaye's "The Scarecrow" was given two presentations in Brattle Hall, Cambridge, and one in Jordan Hall (seating 1,019), Boston, by the Harvard Dramatic Club; the "Medea" of Euripides in Mr. Gilbert Murray's version was given three presentations in Jordan Hall by Bryn Mawr College graduates; and Mr. William Vaughn Moody's "Faith Healer" was presented, in rather a commercialized form, by Mr. Henry Miller at Harvard, on invitation of the English department. These three results of private enterprise have somewhat brought up the average.

During this same two months there have been a great plethora of dancing attractions! Ruth St. Denis danced at the Park Theatre for one week of



eight performances, and at the Colonial and Hollis for four afternoons for three weeks,—a total of 29,728 seats. "The Silver Star" was played at the Colonial, with Adeline Genée as the principal attraction, the capacity being 25,632 seats. Loie Fuller and her Ballet danced at the Opera House for a week, with a total capacity of 21,744 (and the principal feature of this performance was given at Keith's Theatre for three weeks more). Isadora Duncan danced once at the Boston Opera House, 2,718 seats; Maud Allan, twice at Symphony Hall; Gertrude von Axen, once at Jordan Hall, 1,019 seats; while Raymond Duncan performed once at the same place, as did also the Countess Pierrefeu,—the total capacity for these performances of dancing amounting to 87,677 seats.

The vaudeville situation, as represented by the better class houses in Boston, such as Keith's and the American Music Hall, is, on the whole, not unsatisfactory. These theatres cater to audiences composed largely of women and children, and their influence is, for the most part, at least innocuous, the managers having apparently learned that a clean show pays better, as a business proposition, than one that is vicious or even suggestive.

The worst criticism that can be made of the average performance at these houses is that at least half, often more, of the acts on the program are just plain "padding," pure and simple, inexcusably dull and mediocre. This condition reflects more upon the taste of the audiences than upon the lack of enterprise of the management, for it is axiomatic that so long as the attendance is satisfactory there is no inducement to furnish better (and necessarily higher-priced) acts. The audiences are too good-natured, too easily satisfied. Under penalty of withholding their patronage they should demand a higher average standard for the whole program.

The "playlet," so called, has become a prominent feature in the program. It is, roughly speaking, of two kinds, farcical or sentimental. The same criticism applies to both. The farce or the sentiment, as the case may be, is too broadly obvious. Little is left to the imagination. The humor is forced, and the sentiment too often mawkish, in either case vitiating the taste of the audience and fatal to any real artistic value. The actors apparently credit their auditors with a rather lower order of intelligence than would seem to be justified when one notes the quick response to and ready appreciation of an occasional piece of a better sort, performed with some approach to artistic merit. This apparent tendency to "play down" to the audience is a curious reflection upon the judgment and sincerity of both actor and producer.

In justice to these theatres, however, it is only fair to state that they offer in the course of a season many acts which *are* of real artistic merit and value. Some of the "head-liners" in their programs rank among the greatest artists of the contemporary stage, comparing favorably with many of the alleged stars appearing in productions at the regular theatres.

By popularizing the best things and eliminating much of the trash which now cumbers many of the programs, this class of entertainment may well exert an influence for good which will be far-reaching and redound to the mutual advantage and profit of management and patron.

At the Bijou Dream a serious attempt has been made to make the moving-picture show of educational value, and a quite surprising list of features has been given at that house during the period covered by this report,—short lectures; songs of popular and musical appeal, such as the Toreador song from "Carmen," for instance; and moving pictures showing patriotic events and scenes of

educational value. This policy has proven so successful that the management has recently raised the admission from ten cents, the universal sum elsewhere, to twenty cents for afternoon and evening, and the house continues to be crowded.

The Boston Opera House has given one season of grand opera by its own company and a short season by the Metropolitan Opera Company.

The répertoire has consisted of standard Italian and French operas, including popular operas of the modern school, like "La Bohème," "La Tosca," "Madame Butterfly," "Cavalleria Rusticana."

The staging has been, for the most part, excellent and up to date, in some cases magnificent; the costuming careful and artistic. The stage detail has, in many instances, been so well worked up that some people have thought the tendency was to take the attention away from the things of importance which depend entirely upon the principals. The singing has been of exceptional excellence, with markedly good chorus work. The subscription performances have been well supported, and the audiences, excepting on Thursday nights, always large. The Sunday concerts by operatic stars have been much enjoyed, and, while some interest was evinced in the Saturday night débutante performances, they have been recently abandoned in favor of a "popular-priced" performance on that same evening.

Criticism of the standard operas would be as much out of place as criticism of Shakespeare or Goethe. Some of them may be old-fashioned, but they illustrate the highest attainments of musical dramatic art. One may enlarge upon the poor quality of many of the older librettos, or upon the departure from high standards of morals in librettos, both old and new, but it is to be remembered that the libretto is not so much a record of life as a record of moods which the music seizes and takes

REGULAR THEATRE ATTRACTIONS

Theatre.	No. of performances per week.	November 29-December 4.	December 5-11.	December 12-18.	December 19-25.
Hollis . . . .	8	Detective Sparkes.*	"	A Fool there was.	"
Colonial . . .	8	Young Turk.*	"	Miss Mollie May.	"
Park . . . . .	8	11th Week. Gentleman from Mississippi.	"	Van Allen's Wife.	"
Tremont . . .	8	Such a Little Queen.*	"	Follies of 1909.	"
Shubert . . .	7				
Majestic . . .	8	The Chaperon.*	Deborah of Tod's	"	The Battle.
Globe . . . . .	8	2d Week. The City.	"	Jolly Bachelors.	"
Boston . . . .	8	Circus Man.*	"	"	"
Grand Opera House . . .	9	Volunteer Organist.*	Girl from U. S. A.	Little Tenor.	Cowboy Thief.
Castle Square .	12	Honor.*	Taming of the Shrew.	Man with a Past.	"1915."
Bowdoin Square,	12	Held by the Enemy.*	Way Down in Maine.	Daughters of the Poor.	Policy Changed Moving-picture House.

\* Those plays marked with a star opened or closed the first or last weeks of the season. Of other attractions, "What Every Woman Knows," "The Man from Home," and "The City" played one week, and "The Gentleman from Mississippi" ten weeks before Christmas. A. "Dick Whittington" did not open until Tuesday night on account of a broken leg. B. "Bright Eyes" did not open until Tuesday night on account of the company being out of town. C. "1915" at the Castle Square did not open until Friday night of Christmas week. D. Two extra performances of "The Girl from Rector's" were given Thursday and Friday nights.

OV. 29, 1909, TO FEB. 5, 1910

er 26- v 1.	January 2-8.	January 9-15.	January 16-22.	January 23-29.	January 30- February 5.
	Inconstant George.	"	Israel	"	What Every Woman Knows.
ng a	"	Silver Star.	"	Penelope.	" *
	The Man from Home.	"	"	"	"
	Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.	"	"	"	"
			Theatre opened January 24.	Taming of the Shrew (3). Merchant of Venice (3). Romeo and Juliet (1).	Hamlet (2).* Merchant of Venice (1). Twelfth Night (3). Romeo and Juliet (2).
	Dick A. Whittington.	"	"	The Beauty Spot.	" *
	"	Minstrels.	"	Mr. Lode of Koal.	" *
B.	"	"	"	The Girl from Rector's.	" * D.
id an.	Sal the Circus Gal.	The Gam- bler of the West.	Counsel for the Defence (4). Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (3). The Bells (2).	Working- man's Wife.	Quincy Adams Sawyer.*
	"		"	Othello.	Are you a Mason? *

od.  
a of Sunnybrook Farm" are still running at their respective theatres; and "The  
a flooding the theatre on Monday.  
by a blizzard.  
being kept dark the first part of the week for final rehearsals.  
afternoons of the week of January 30

up into abstract realms of emotion. The power of the composer to fitly and ideally intrepert human moods in music is the index of musical development in opera. Some have objected that so much time should be given to the Italian and French schools and none so far to the German; but new generations of opera-goers are coming upon the scene, who should know the standard works of art of the past, whether Italian, French, or German. Besides, what the Boston company has not given is supplied by the New York companies in Wagner seasons, and such modern operas as "Pelléas and Mélisande," "Louise," and "Electra." The ballet, when used, has been effective, especially in the performance of "La Gioconda," where it was of exceptional beauty, appropriately introduced, and performed with exquisite art.

On the whole, the Opera House management has given to Boston exceptional opportunities for enjoying musical art, second only to those offered by the Symphony Orchestra.

While not originally intended as a part of this report, it is necessary to a fair understanding of the case that the great number of so-called "concerts" in the theatres and moving-picture shows in and about Boston on every Sunday evening should be recorded. The moving-picture shows run four to six performances on Sunday evenings. The theatres, even some of those playing straight attractions during the week, are given over to the same type of Sunday night "concert," to which is added, for the most part, the poorer sort of vaudeville "acts" to be seen at the same theatres, or at the vaudeville and burlesque houses, during the week. These "concerts" are more fully attended than the performances of any other night except Saturday, so the entire number of seats available at these performances can be justly added to the grand total of burlesque and vaudeville.

The Grand Opera House, not listed in the table, gives a weekly Sunday night performance in Yiddish with a New York company. It may be noted here that the "concert" at the Boston Opera House is probably the only high-class undertaking in the entire number given. The number of Sunday evening performances has been compiled in tabulated form. The total of attendance shows the total capacity of the houses for that one evening.

TABLE IV  
SUNDAY NIGHT PERFORMANCES

<i>Theatre.</i>	<i>No. of performances.</i>	<i>Seating capacity.</i>	<i>Total Seating capacity.</i>
Boston Opera House . . . . .	1		2,718
Globe . . . . .	1		1,531
Castle Square . . . . .	1		1,813
Keith's . . . . .	1		2,020
American . . . . .	1		1,792
Howard . . . . .	1		1,489
Columbia . . . . .	1		1,799
Bowdoin . . . . .	1		1,365
Austin & Stone's . . . . .	3	351	953
Palace . . . . .	3	1,000	3,000
Bijou Dream . . . . .	2	838	1,676
Washington . . . . .	2	529	1,058
Unique . . . . .	3	499	1,497
Old South . . . . .	3	452	1,356
Crown . . . . .	1	427	427
Comique . . . . .	6	397	2,382
Star . . . . .	4	365	1,460
Pastime . . . . .	4	360	1,440
Paradise . . . . .	4	352	1,408
Premier . . . . .	4	318	1,272
Queen . . . . .	3	310	930
Empire . . . . .	3	300	900
Liberty . . . . .	3	298	894
Joliette . . . . .	4	276	1,104
Dreamland . . . . .	4	259	1,036
Scenic Temple, East Boston . . .	1	575	575
Magic, East Boston . . . . .	3	198	594
Empire, East Boston . . . . .	2	151	302
			<hr/> 38,791

### III

Any examination of the dramatic departments in the daily and Sunday papers cannot fail to suggest that there exists a very definite relation between criticism and advertising. For instance, why else does the *Transcript* criticise performances at the Casino and Gaiety Theatres on Tuesday night, and mention them in advance notices on Saturday evening, when it ignores the Howard and Columbia, theatres of exactly the same class? Complaint is constantly made by the public that the papers do not make a proper attempt to inform their readers of the *kind* of show that is being given at the different classes of theatres. No emphasis, for instance, is placed on the fact that the burlesque performances are in any way different from musical comedies or farces reviewed at the more legitimate play-houses. From anything that the public can tell by reading these advertisements, a performance at the Casino may be just as respectable and refined as one at the Colonial or the Hollis during the same week. It may be argued that this is a minor matter, and that those attending the different theatres know what to expect. Nevertheless, while the managers of the principal theatres themselves (outside of the vaudeville and burlesque houses) make no attempt to specialize or follow a consistent policy for their houses, the public is constantly being misled.

It is well known to every play-goer that the public is never accurately informed when plays are *not* worth seeing! The critic is then disposed to disguise his sentiments within a mist of words which quite prevent the ordinary reader from discovering whether or not he will obtain his money's worth by attending the performance under discussion. In this custom—for it has grown to be such—all of the newspapers are in common fault. Is



it not possible that they have overlooked their duty to the public by keeping their eye too closely upon the counting house? While it may be difficult to adopt a standard that will apply suitably to the entire theatre-going public, it is *not* a difficult matter to state clearly and exactly, in a few words, the type of play given at the various theatres, and its comparative standing in the grade or class to which it belongs.

Rather an exception to this state of affairs occurred in reviews of "The Girl from Rector's." The morning papers on Tuesday, January 25, make it quite plain that the play was "a little beyond description"; "raw," with "four acts of double life and marital infidelity that are painted in brutally frank colors," "bristling with slang from Broadway's all-night joints and allusions that have not even the delicacy of double meaning," "a dance with three girls . . . that for rank suggestiveness has probably never been seen outside of the real old Moulin Rouge in its palmiest days" (this from the *Herald*). Whether or not the *Transcript* was trying to counteract this unusual frankness in that morning's criticism is, judging from the following excerpts from its criticism of the same evening, an interesting question! "There is no doubt that the spectators enjoyed themselves, and whatever stern moralists may say in regard to plays like 'The Girl from Rector's' there is unquestionably a large part of our theatre-going population that like this sort of play." (There is!—51,264 of them, in Boston!) "As for double lives, men have been leading them since the days of Adam and Lilith and some of the best of the old Greek comedies are built up around a tale of marital infidelity." "The last act, whether viewed from the point of morality or of art, is inferior to the others." Those who saw this act will acknowledge that this calmly reserved statement is drawing it somewhat mildly,

to say the least. Palliative comment such as this certainly lends color to the suspicion that the newspaper frequently does not prove itself a proper guardian or informant of the public.

The morals of theatrical advertising are also not to be overlooked in this connection. The papers for Saturday, Jan. 29, and Sunday, Jan. 30, 1910, carried this advertisement: "Keith's Theatre, Third Big Week, breaking all records. Loie Fuller's Ballet of Light and Barefoot Dancers," the implication obviously being that Loie Fuller and her entire Ballet were dancing at this theatre.

In versions printed in the text columns the implication was even broader, it being stated, practically in so many words, that the same act that had been given on the stage of the Opera House was to be repeated at Keith's Theatre. All the press reports and criticisms of the performance said nothing in denial of this claim; yet the facts were that only seven of the dancers appeared in the advertised act, Loie Fuller herself, for a part of the time, not being one of the number! Such misrepresentation as this is common. "The Midnight Sons," a current attraction, announces "Company of 250." This number should be about divided in half, only a few over a hundred appearing on the stage. Hardly a bulletin board announcing a New York run but brazenly and boldly lies about its extent. Ten or twelve weeks in New York (several of which were very probably in Brooklyn or in remotely situated theatres) is advertised on the road as "One Year in New York," or "300 Nights on Broadway." A season of 30 weeks (divided among the same groups of theatres) is advertised on the road as "70 weeks in New York" or "490 days in New York." More conscientious managers actually run their plays in the smaller New York theatres week after week at considerable loss to themselves, in order to get

some excuse for sending them upon the road as a claimed "Broadway Success" with a record for a long run!

#### IV

After the Iroquois fire a law was passed by the Massachusetts legislature which, in the main, raised the standard for the safety of buildings to be used for theatrical purposes. Unfortunately, this law applied only to buildings thereafter to be constructed, so thereby largely losing its effect, inasmuch as the greatest danger naturally existed in the older buildings already in use.

The Howard Athenæum is an old, exceedingly frail and dry, wooden structure. The auditorium is on the second story (also true of the Bijou Dream and Nickelodeon), and, while it has since been equipped with all the possible preventives that can be imposed by the building department, it is *not* a safe auditorium to receive the crowds that throng it twice a day.

The Palace has an auditorium on the street floor, but there is no exit for the audience except from the front of the auditorium, that necessitates passing directly over the boiler-room which is located under the entrance lobby, staircases and sidewalk!

Austin & Stone's hall is on the street floor, but the dressing-rooms are partly in a temporary wooden building on the second and third stories of the same structure. This house seats only 351, and there appears little excuse for its now being licensed as a theatre, inasmuch as it does not comply with any of the requirements imposed by the building law. On the other hand, almost all the moving-picture shows, of more recent construction, of larger size, and more nearly complying with these laws, have been continually refused theatre licenses by the licensing authorities.

In the case of one other theatre, the Columbia, the

top gallery is pitched at an angle that can hardly be imagined by any one who has not visited it. This extreme pitch has been the cause of several serious accidents. It would seem that this balcony could be altogether closed to the public without much loss to the management and with considerable betterment to public safety.

New legislation is needed—and badly needed—to bring the older auditoriums of the city into a condition where they will accommodate, with safety, the public which now crowds them. New and proper legislation is also needed to define and control the “moving-picture theatre”; whose existence is not recognized in the present statutes! The building department makes monthly inspections of these theatres, but entirely on its own initiative. The Bijou Dream is, in a way, the most dangerous of them all, especially as the audience here is composed largely of women and children. This theatre has a staircase leading straight down from the auditorium to the street in *one continuous flight of thirty-two steps!* In a panic, or in case of any one stumbling upon this staircase, a dangerous blockade would be absolutely unavoidable. The new laws require a landing between every fifteen steps, and these laws were in force at the time the Bijou Dream was opened to be regularly used as a moving-picture show-house! Technically, the law may not have been evaded, but a license for regular performances could at that time have been withheld at the discretion of the licensing authority! The provisions made to protect those appearing on the stage of the Bijou Dream are also totally inadequate. A narrow, boxed-in, blind staircase winds deviously down from temporary dressing-rooms located on the roof of the building over the auditorium. In case of fire it would be a practical impossibility for any in these rooms to escape. Probably it will need a catastrophe of considerable importance and magnitude to bring these matters

before the public with sufficient force to cause effective action to be taken. It cannot be stated too strongly at this time that this report is only one more, and perhaps the last, time they will be brought to the attention of the authorities, and that, if any accident (such as the Iroquois Theatre fire) comes to any one of these places, the responsibility for that accident will lie upon the licensing authority alone, the Mayor of the City of Boston!

Chapter 450, Section 6, of the Acts of 1904, calls for the publication, by the licensing officer, of a yearly report on the condition of theatres and public halls. This stipulation, for some reason or other, has never been complied with.

The management of all the older houses evidenced both willingness and alacrity to comply with all the protective measures asked of them by the authorities. There is hardly a first-class theatre in town, for instance, that has the number of actual fire-escapes and exits to be found at the Howard Athenæum. Yet the adoption of the proper kind of legislation could be made to result in great improvements in all these old structures, without inflicting any serious injury upon their owners or lessees. Otherwise, there is nothing to prevent these buildings remaining in use until they burn up or fall down from a decrepit old age. So far a few of the cheaper theatres have been mentioned by name and an idea of their most serious defects given. Any theatre-goer who is curiously inclined might wait after any performance at the first-class houses, note for himself the time required to empty the house, and then draw his own conclusions. Attention might particularly be directed to the Colonial, Hollis, Globe, and Bowdoin Square Theatres, no one of which was built to come under the building laws now in force. The Tremont is perhaps provided with the greatest number of effective exits, the Shu-

bert following it a close second. In the case of the Boston Theatre, while the floor can be readily emptied, the balconies, especially the topmost one, would, if crowded, become the inevitable scene of dire accident in the case of a panic or fire. It is a matter of record that early in December last an attack was instigated against the management of some of the principal moving-picture shows. The regular theatre pays a license of \$100 a year: the moving-picture show license amounts to \$75. In every case the moving-picture show would be glad to pay the extra \$25 in order to have a regular theatre license. Inasmuch as their seating capacity does not, in most cases, exceed a few hundred, this has been made an excuse for refusal to issue a full theatre license. The last administration also assumed the responsibility of defining the scope of a moving-picture show, and restricting the performance to moving pictures, with a *single* song not to exceed five minutes in length, evidently with the intention of preventing these entertainments from competing in any degree with the vaudeville theatres!

This action conflicted with a State law that required the moving-picture manager to run no films without turning up the lights for five minutes out of every twenty, and "varying" the entertainment (this in order to rest the eyes of the audience). They were consequently forced to put in a vaudeville turn or two to entertain their public during the time the pictures could not be run.

In spite of this conflict the mayor attempted to enforce his restriction, and the matter was brought to a head by the closing of three of the principal of these theatres on their busiest day, a Saturday. After running several hours over the time when they had been commanded to stop performances, the owners, under legal advice, finally closed down, and applied for an injunction to restrain inter-

ference with their business. Before the hearing was held on the injunction, the mayor restored their licenses *after first compelling the managers all to sign papers acknowledging that they had been in the wrong!* In the judgment of several of those who have had occasion to investigate the matter, there seems to be no doubt but that this wholly arbitrary attempt to control the moving-picture performances was primarily instigated by some of the local vaudeville interests.

## V

Whether or not the question of morality should enter into a review of this sort might have remained in doubt, had not that side of the matter been brought directly before the Committee by the two weeks' engagement, at the largest theatre in Boston, with a seating capacity of 2,848, of "The Girl from Rector's," played to "standing room only," with eight performances the first week and ten performances (two extra matinees!) the second,—a total of 51,264 people seating capacity! This play had been publicly condemned in a recent frank and outspoken article in the *American Magazine*. It carried no appeal other than a purely salacious or suggestive one, besides being incredibly stupid and boresome. Certainly, it was a peculiar commentary on human nature—even in Boston—that, despite (or possibly because of) this unsavory advance reputation, it so crowded the house as to cause the management to add two extra matinees,—a thing that has hardly happened before in the memory of the oldest theatre-goer! Largely because of this incident, it has become impossible to review conditions as they exist to-day in the theatres of Boston without recognizing evidences of a decrease in standards of public decency that are not to be conscientiously evaded. For

years a production known as "The Black Crook," in reality the first burlesque show of the type that is to-day so widely prevalent, has long possessed a most unenviable reputation. To-day this performance would be so far distanced by its competitors that it would hardly cause a momentary ripple of discussion,—save that it would probably fail to find audiences enough to keep it on the road!

Only a few years ago, when the first so-called "barefoot dancers" came to Boston, an attempt was made to head off or prevent the performance, not from any immorality in a dancer appearing in bare feet, if such were her wish or the desire of the management, but merely because it was evidently the beginning of a further breaking down of those barriers that separate the audience from the performer upon the stage. This suspicion has been more than realized. In a comparatively brief time, about a year, there has been a perfect deluge of dancers appearing with a less and less amount of conventional apparel, and the fact that the most slightly dressed among them have been those that have appealed to the most intelligent and refined audiences does not alter the physical aspect of the case. Those who keep in mind the progress of the theatre sit back and wonder what is next in store.

Equally undesirable, and evidencing the same tendency in a form perhaps still more to be deprecated, have been the attempts made by certain managers further to remove the barrier between performer and audience by sending members of the company over the footlights at every performance. This has been accomplished in different ways. One of the most sensational illusions has been the sending of a balloon or aeroplane out over the heads of the audience, carrying one or two girls singing; or swings carrying a chorus far out over the auditorium and back and up among



the flies of the stage. Sometimes the entire chorus, dressed as Hussars, march out over the footlights, to sing a verse of their song standing in single file down each of the centre aisles of the house; or performers, stationed at different places around the auditorium, sing or converse with people upon the stage, or, from locations in the boxes or in stalls near the footlights, take a regular part, by conversation or song, in the performance. Again it is asked, and rightly, What will be the next innovation embodying this same appeal? and again those interested in the development of the stage await with some anxiety the opening of a new season and the production of a new batch of plays!

The entertainment regularly found at some classes of theatres does *not* tend to improve or refine the moral sense, in case any still exists in the spectators. In some cases it appears to be distinctly the intention of those directing or responsible for the performance to debase or destroy such a sense. In the opinion of many persons the performances given every week, twice a day, at the Gaiety, Casino, Columbia, and Howard, are seriously injurious and depraving to those who habitually attend these theatres. Whatever the consensus of opinion may be in regard to the question of their morality, there can be no doubt but that many reasons may be found for deprecating such public exhibitions. It is the opinion of those of the Committee who have investigated particularly this type of entertainment that all of these theatres should be compelled by public sentiment to clean house.

The recent efforts made by a few citizens to prevent an objectionable play revealed the fact that the present law is totally inefficient in providing any proper control over theatrical presentations, and that the act passed by the legislature two

years ago, ostensibly to protect public morals, was carried by the Association of Theatrical Managers, written by their lawyers, and so cleverly worded that it becomes quite impossible to take any effective action under the law as laid down by this bill. The matter is perhaps stated in the clearest and best possible manner in the appended communication from Police Commissioner O'Meara, under date of Feb. 10, 1910:—

*Dear Sir,*—There is no probability that any performance likely to be given in a theatre could be attacked effectively on the ground of immorality by prosecution under the criminal laws.

A theatre may be reached through its license. The licensing authority is the mayor, but his free action is obstructed by the act of 1908, which requires that both the mayor and the police commissioner shall be of the opinion jointly that particular parts of a performance are immoral. What such opinion could be based upon other than personal observation I am unable to say. Should the two officials be in agreement, the mayor has a right to direct that the parts of the performance in question be eliminated. I presume that the authority would not be sufficient to justify the suppression of a whole performance, and yet the worst material usually consists of gestures, postures, and other manifestations, oral or acted, scattered all along the way. Should the persons responsible for the performance fail to eliminate the parts indicated, the mayor may suspend the license of the theatre for "such particular representation," whatever that means.

This act of 1908 was passed, I believe, on petition of the Theatrical Managers' Association, by whose counsel it was drawn, and it is as nearly worthless as the managers probably intended it should be. The police commissioner was included without my knowledge, and, if I had been aware of the intention to produce so absurd a complication, I should have protested.

The full power should be with the licensing authority. The licensee should be held responsible for the character of every performance given in his theatre, and punish-

ment by suspension of license should follow any unlawful exhibition.

Respectfully,

(Signed) STEPHEN O'MEARA,  
*Police Commissioner.*

In the present condition of affairs, therefore, nothing whatever can be done in the matter. As may be seen by Mr. O'Meara's letter, both the authorities and the public are utterly powerless. The practical results of a decision recently handed down in the appellate division of the Supreme Court of New York City prove this. An action was brought by the city against the Alhambra Theatre in Harlem to recover a \$500 penalty alleged to be due for an objectionable performance given on December 20, 1907. There was no conflict on the evidence, *but* a decision was only reached on Feb. 4, 1910,—more than two years after the date of the performance in question. The gist of the situation is contained in the following paragraph, printed in the papers of Saturday, Feb. 5, 1910:—

“According to W. H. Grossman, counsel for Percy Williams, who owns the Alhambra Theatre, the decision leaves the situation much the same as it always has been. ‘Of course,’ he said, ‘the case will come up for retrial, and if the verdict is against us, it will mean the payment of the \$500 fine. The theatre license cannot be revoked, because the license referred to was last year’s!’”

An unsuccessful attempt to stop a play could not be kept out of the public press, and would merely result in widely and effectively advertising the performance to the public; while under the present law, the act or performance could be continued *exactly* in its objectionable form until the

matter could be decided by the Courts, which might be in one, or two, or three years after the initial step had been taken!

Under a properly-worded law, making theatre licensees responsible for the performances given, making these licenses revocable in the same way every other license issued by the city or any of its departments is revocable, and making it possible to apply the criminal law as it exists on the statute books for other licensees to the theatrical licensee, immediate retribution would overtake those who offend against public morals, and the closing of a theatre for one day would mean a monetary loss to both the licensee and to the company playing the house that would act as a most effective deterrent to any other house or company likely to come under a similar ban! At present no authority exists capable of closing a house *even under the most extreme conditions*, no matter how flagrant the offence may be!\* It must be remembered that such offences rarely, if ever, consist of directly spoken lines, being almost altogether a matter of implication and suggestion, over which it would be impossible to exercise sufficient censorship or control, or any effective legislation by the present process of law. The placing of power to revoke a license solely in the hands of the licensing officer is an essential preliminary step. The consideration of the effect of such revocation, if ill advised, would in itself prove a considerable check upon the undue use of such power: whereas the person possessing it, when well advised, would be in a position to exercise absolutely an

\* The action of a previous mayor, in causing the withdrawal of announced performances of the Opera of "Salome" and the abandonment of an engagement of "The Queen of the Moulin Rouge" was taken quite without authority and probably was only effective—in each case—because the management did not expect either performance would make a profitable return and, under the circumstances, it was not worth while to enter a contest with the authorities! It is significant that this prohibited play will be presented at the same theatre in March in defiance of the public opinion expressed against its performance last season.

influence over the theatres, probably without ever having to enforce his authority to the extent made possible by such an act of legislation.

FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN,  
*Chairman,*

Miss HELEN A. CLARKE,

Miss LOTTA A. CLARK,

ROBERT M. BAKER,

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE,

WILLIAM F. MACY,

*Drama Committee.*

EDWARD H. CHANDLER,

*Secretary.*

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